

*Samuel McEwen & Co*



THE STORY

OF THE

6TH SERVICE BATTALION

OF THE

ROYAL

INNISKILLING FUSILIERS.

BY

THE GREAT WAR.

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OF THE  
6TH ROYAL  
INNISKILLING FUSILIERS.

ENNISKILLEN :

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Dedicated to

THE MEMORY OF MANY GALLANT NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS  
AND MEN OF THE  
6TH ROYAL INNISKILLING FUSILIERS,  
WHO ARE LAID TO REST  
AT SUVLA BAY, SERBIA, THE STRUMA VALLEY (MACEDONIA),  
PALESTINE AND FRANCE,  
WHOSE DEATHS TAUGHT US HOW TO LIVE.



Alex M. Muttan  
Nancy Burns

## PREFACE.

This little book makes no pretence to be a historical or literary work; it is simply a diary of one who was an eye witness of every incident narrated in it, written in the form of a more or less complete story of the events in chronological order in the biography of the 6th (S.) Battalion Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, with no other idea than as an official record of and testimony to the loyalty to the cause, the gallantry and unselfish devotion to duty of the non-commissioned officers and men who served in the unit.

Nobody is in a better position to know their worth than the writer, who asserts without hesitation or fear of contradiction that from the time of the formation until the final disbanding of the unit, at no single time during the whole



course of their career as Inniskillings, did the men, at home or abroad, ever give the slightest cause to their officers to be otherwise than right proud of them and honoured at serving with them, who through many trials lived up to the spirit of the motto of their regiment and nobly upheld the highest traditions of the British Army in dark days as in brighter ones.

Any opinions vouchsafed on individual operations are purely those of the writer, who claims to speak for nobody but himself.

In discussing various events and battles it has been difficult to refrain from mentioning the names of individual men who distinguished themselves, especially those whose deeds revive the liveliest memory of certain operations and yet left the army with no tangible recognition; but it would have been impossible to avoid omitting the names of some such, and accordingly personalities are excluded throughout.

One allusion is made to the interven-

tion of Providence or, as some would call it, "the luck of the devil," that saved us from certain catastrophe, but this was far from being the only occasion when some hidden power stepped in to avert disaster that stared us in the face, and which we know was avoided by no act or effort of ours; or to furnish additional proof, if such were needed, that arms, men and munitions alone could never have won the war contrary to God's plan.

Many pens more able than mine have discussed the moral results of the war, and it is no part of the writer's plan to add to this mass of literature further than to hint that one obvious result is, that the rank and file, as representing the workers, have made an immense impression for good on the commissioned ranks as representing the professional class, and to suggest that the secret of the country's future success depends on how far the workers receive that degree of trust and confidence which they have inspired. As we have fought for victory together so let us live for peace, not forgetting the lessons



of our experience, and remembering that the comradeship, which made light of our darkest days during the war, if not preserved now, will have the opposite effect on the days to come, when in spite of our intimate knowledge of the men to whom the victory is due, the men in the ranks, we permit suspicion and mistrust to poison the friendship which we so valued in action.

*September, 1919.*

## 6th INNISKILLINGS.

THE 5TH AND 6TH BATTALIONS of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers were formed at Omagh within one month after the outbreak of war. Both units were then sent to Dublin, the 6th Battalion going to the Royal Barracks.

The following month another move was made, and the sister battalions found themselves housed together again in Richmond Barracks at Inchicore, where they were brigaded with two battalions of the Royal Irish Fusiliers in the 31st Infantry Brigade of the 10th (Irish) Division; and real hard training, which included much inter-battalion sport, ensued.

Keen rivalry in work and play so knit together this Battalion with the 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers, that thereafter and throughout practically the whole of the war, these two units, though always competing against each other, yet had cultivated a spirit of comradeship that was invaluable to the Brigade, which, either by coincidence or intention, fostered that spirit by invariably working, fighting, and camping the two units together.

The Battalion was at full strength and was progressing favourably when the War Office wrote



to our Brigade giving men in it the option of joining the new Ulster Division. About half the men of A Company took advantage of this movement and left us. To fill the vacancies thus created we received a draft of men who had joined the D.C.L.I.

The next event of importance was our second change in Commanding Officers.

During the opening months of the new year our programme included one or two ceremonial parades and inspections. With other troops of the Irish command our Battalion lined the streets of Dublin for the departure of the Viceroy, Lord Aberdeen, and, later, took part in a review of the division by the new Lord Lieutenant in Phoenix Park.

About three weeks after this event the entire Division was transferred to Basingstoke, arriving in camp there on the last day of April.

For the next two months we indulged in most strenuous training, chiefly Divisional manoeuvres.

#### BASINGSTOKE.

Sir A. Hunter, himself an old Inniskilling, inspected the troops in the Park near Basingstoke, and, on the occasion of our march back from Aldershot, where our musketry course was fired, we had the honour of meeting the King. Lord Kitchener also inspected the Division before its departure from England.

It was not until the month of July opened that we knew definitely that the 10th Division was

bound for the East, and our sailing orders had arrived. Our sojourn in Basingstoke ended with a Brigade sports meeting, and at six a.m. July 11, 1915, our Battalion entrained for Devonport, embarked on the *Andania*, and sailed the following day.

The voyage was uneventful. At Malta the troops did not go ashore, though some officers had this privilege, but at Alexandria, where over two days were spent, the Battalion indulged in a route march.

#### LEMNOS.

Eventually, the harbour at Lemnos was reached on July 23, and for two days the transports, containing troops of the Division, sheltered from the perils of the sea here with many craft of the British navy and mercantile service.

As this was the base for the operations on the Gallipoli peninsula we were destined to see more of the place later, though that was not a certainty in our minds when on July 25 we steamed to Mitylene.

#### MITYLENE.

The scene that met our gaze as the ship entered that splendid harbour, with the long narrow entrance, at six o'clock on a perfect morning, will never be forgotten. Nobody who has not experienced it can realize the joy of being in the shade and of seeing some green verdure and foliage after over a fortnight's exposure to the unmerciful rays of a July sun in the Mediterranean. Life here was not



unpleasant. We went ashore on several occasions and entertained both the Military and the Civil Governors to dinner on board, while much swimming and boating was enjoyed.

The outstanding incident of importance was a visit by Sir Ian Hamilton, who gave us no hint that we were to take part in the fighting on the Peninsula, but, on the contrary, by circulating pamphlets purporting to be a description of Smyrna and the surrounding country, he turned our thoughts otherwards.

But, in the early afternoon of August 6, a naval pinnace dashed into the harbour, and it was soon quite unmistakable that it bore tidings of great import. Soon all was bustle and excitement,—a very marked contrast to the peace that prevailed an hour before, and within two hours small steamers had moored alongside each transport and had loaded up with all the military cargo of men and material on board.

As dusk drew near we took leave of H.M.T. *Andania* and her officers, and sailed out of the harbour. All doubt in our minds now was removed, and we knew that before the sun arose again our "first battle of the war" would have started. Yet the men played cards and "house" as if they were trippers on the way to Margate. Nobody slept, the tiny ship was much overcrowded.

#### HELLES.

Now the 13th Division had taken advantage of the darkness to force a surprise landing, close to

and south of that part of the coast reserved for our effort, while to attract the attention of the Turks to another quarter, our troops at Helles made a feint attack, so it is easy to account for the scene on shore as we sailed stealthily along the coast past Cape Helles and made northwards in the darkness.

Just as dawn appeared we weighed anchor in Suvla Bay, and without noise or excitement all the troops were paraded and issued with entrenching tools, after which lighters innumerable appeared as if from nowhere, and each steamer disgorged its human freight into these canoes. They plied backwards and forwards to the shore, and as one awaited his turn it was a memorable scene to watch these craft running the gauntlet of the enemy shells in the sea and interesting to reckon your chances of arriving on shore safe and sound or at all.

The Turks must have been thoroughly alarmed now, and if there had only been one good clear-headed commander on the spot, then the sequel to this operation would not have been what it was.

#### SUVLA BAY.

Having successfully transferred to shore most of the troops, the advance of the 10th Division, less the 5th Connaught Rangers and the remainder of the 29th Brigade, which was ordered to Anzac on the right, and the 5th R. Inniskilling Fusiliers, which supplied a left flank guard, commenced in



good order until Lala Baba was reached and more of the enemy's position became visible.

For some inexplicable reason the troops halted here for nearly an hour—a costly and unpardonable mistake of somebody's, for this order to halt was the only clear and definite order of the whole operations.

#### CHOCOLATE HILL.

It was possible, but not easy, to learn what the objective was when the advance was resumed—"that brown hill in the distance," about three miles away across the Salt Lake. Thereafter there was nobody in control, and junior officers who had been lucky enough to find out the general objective, made for it by whatever route they liked.

It has often been stated that the troops employed were too inexperienced for the task required of them, but the writer is convinced, that, for an operation conducted as this was, the troops present were in every way more suited to it than highly trained specialists or professional soldiers, who would not have moved on the skeleton orders issued verbally and the lack of orders which was a feature of the day.

However that may be, the scheme, if ever there were one, developed into two flank attacks and a frontal attack on this unfortunate hill, called Chocolate Hill.

Even at this stage, had one commander present taken the whole operation in hand, it would have been a brilliant success, but the Battalion com-

manders were not one whit better informed than the company commanders, who had received no orders but those mentioned.

#### THE ATTACK.

The opposition encountered was not great, and, even had orders been issued to advance until forced to halt, Sir Ian Hamilton's Promised Land would have been reached that night. But as it was, the first troops to reach Chocolate Hill, which were D Company of the 7th Royal Dublin Fusiliers with one platoon of our Battalion, did not arrive until 19.30, and it was twenty minutes later before a concerted assault on the summit could be mutually arranged with the Lincolns and the Borderers, who were on the right. The remainder of our Battalion, which had had much the worst line of approach across the Salt Lake, with not a blade of cover, had reached the foot of the hill at this time.

Enough has been written about the bitter pangs of thirst and the awful heat endured by the troops here, so that this allusion to it will suffice to recall it to the mind of the reader both here and in the following pages.

#### A MEMORABLE FEATURE.

The memorable feature of this day was the outstanding bravery of R.A.M.C. officers, and one incident which the writer witnessed will suffice to show the spirit of the troops. After struggling across a narrow isthmus of deep, slimy mud, a concentration of men was collected in a fold in the

7.30 P.M.



ground. The enemy immediately secured three direct hits on this target, firing across open sights. Immediately men rose to move forward a voice shouted "Remain where you are," and of these four hundred odd men there were only three who did not immediately resume their positions and calmly await the next battery fire.

Now darkness prevented a further advance on August 7, but there was not a man there who did not fully expect to continue the advance at dawn to the obvious final objective three miles further on. That no such orders were issued during the night was a surprise to everybody.

#### DISAPPOINTMENT.

It required no training in strategy to see that once having gained the higher ridge of mountains in front, full command of the whole peninsula was ours, yet, as if it was our intention to lose the battle, no orders to resume the offensive were issued and the Turk was allowed a free hand on Sunday to bring up all the necessary reinforcements.

The Gallipoli enterprise had failed then, and there was nothing to gain by not evacuating the peninsula that night, instead of five months later.

True, there was some severe fighting of individual units to gain small advantages of position, but nothing like a general advance, and so the enemy reached the spine of the peninsula, and remained there secure.

#### · REST.

For the following three days the Battalion remained in this position, and then was withdrawn to the beach for a rest, but there was no rest, as a false scare that the enemy had broken through and were advancing on the guns at Lala Baba, kept it out all night. This incident serves to show the absolute lack of communication.

#### KIRETECH TEPE.

On August 13 the Brigade concentrated on a ridge of hills on the north of the Salt Lake, running along the shore or close to it. This was known as Kiretech Tepe Sirt, and it was here that our 5th Battalion had been until now. The two units of Royal Irish Fusiliers had suffered somewhat heavily on the second day, and it was now the turn of our 5th Battalion to show its mettle in a most gallant and costly action, with no result, in the ground on the east side of Kiretech Tepe.

Thereafter, what remained of the 5th went back to recoup, while our unit moved towards Jephson's Post on the west side of Kiretech Tepe, with our left resting on the sea. A splendid but futile attack had been made by the 6th Dublins to capture an island fort here, but the Turk remained in possession in spite of the wonderful efforts of a Destroyer, which, though smothered in rifle and machine gun fire, yet created havoc at short range with the enemy. Many splendid lads gave



their lives here in attempts to get water for their pals, and this same spot was the scene of the most obvious intervention of Providence on our behalf.

#### THE 29TH DIVISION.

On the night of the 20th the famous 29th Division landed at Suvla from Helles, with the object of reaching the Anafarta ridge, referred to above as the spine of the peninsula or the Promised Land, for from it one could command a view of the entire strait and across to Chanak.

This was only throwing away valuable lives, for if the enemy was secure there on August 9, he was doubly safe now against one Division. His guns were on rails in caves of the hills, while our artillery was inadequate for the smallest affair.

The Battalion took up position in reserve in the 29th Division at Hill 10, on the borders of the Salt Lake, and as our only cover was a battery of field guns we suffered heavily, even without being engaged.

At dusk the Battalion moved up further to the line, reached by the 29th Division, and took over that sector just at the foot of Scimitar Hill from our 1st Battalion, whose casualties had been heavy. This was the first and last time for these two units of the 27th to meet during the war, and was not an auspicious occasion.

The Battalion here simply held the line, and sent out active patrols every night, but the Turk was in an almost impregnable position, and had no fear of being pressed uncomfortably.

It was plainly obvious as one compared positions of the enemy with our own, that the whole enterprise was now a failure, and it was inexplicable why the Turk did not take the offensive at this stage.

#### WITHDRAWAL OF 10TH DIVISION.

On September 29, the 10th Division was withdrawn from Suvla to L-mnos, to prepare for a new campaign, and there was not a man who did not experience a feeling, not of relief at being spared for a short time the strain of the last eight weeks, and having a full night's rest, but rather like a cad for leaving behind in that hell of the Peninsula so many other men who had nothing there to look forward to.

Many writers have described the peninsula, and given a very graphic description of the country, and if my readers refer to them they can have a picture more true than can be here depicted, and can recall the setting in which the part of the war, herein described, was played.

Before ending this summary, it is right that a word of praise should be recorded in favour of the Indian muleteers, whose devotion to duty and heroism was an example to all.



## SERBIA.

Submarines had commenced to make their presence felt in the Mediterranean now and no large transports approached beyond Mudros (capital of Lemnos), so that it was a miniature fleet of small steamers in which troops were crowded like sardines that took the Division to Salonica during the end of October.

It may be that the Gallipoli undertaking had been the cause of the ill-feelings of the Greeks towards us, but in any case one did not require to be a diplomatist to realise that not only were we disliked by them, but they spared no pains to impress us with their enmity.

Now as one enters the harbour of Salonica the scene is very impressive—a fine looking town surrounded by mountains in rear, and on either side; but upon landing and having a closer observation of the town and its human and material contents, one is immediately struck by the tawdry squalor of the whole place, with the possible exception of one street and a few respectable houses on the sea front.

There may have been faults on the part of both nations, but it does not concern us, except in

pointing out our difficulties and the passive opposition we met with in establishing ourselves at Salonica. The Division camped about three miles outside at Lembet, on the Serres road; and after a stay of almost two weeks entrained for Gevgheli. Thence the journey was continued by road through Furka and the Dedeli Pass up to the mountains of Serbia overlooking Strumnitza, where the Division relieved the French who had pushed back some Bulgarian outposts two days previously.

## ROCKY PEAK.

The Battalion occupied Rocky Peak, a mountain well named because of its height and the precipitous ascent.

The most bitter winter weather now set in, accompanied by severe blizzards until by November 26th, the ground was covered in three feet of snow, which soon froze and made it impossible either to go down to the bottom for our dinners or to have them brought to us.

All our belongings were buried in the snow, and the cold and wet were intense. The Bulgar occupied a similar mountain, not more than a stone's throw away, but it was too cold for either him or us to shoot, and both armies were too much occupied in trying to keep the circulation of the blood in their bodies.

Fires at night were not allowed for tactical reasons, so sleep was impossible, and the men suffered greatly. Eventually, our old mates, the 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers, relieved us on December 2, and



we withdrew to the village of Tartoli, where there was abundance of fuel, if nothing else, and in the native cottages of mud the men made themselves comfortable.

But this was not to last long, for though it was asserted plainly that no heavy engagement would be undertaken north of the Macedonian frontier, and it was common knowledge, before the Bulgar attacked, that our troops would withdraw without becoming involved with very much superior forces, so long as the Serbian armies' retreat was secure, yet on the 8th inst., without any warning, the Bulgar in overwhelming numbers attacked all along the line during one of those dense fogs which we dreaded in the mountains and which made our work so anxious.

Rocky Peak fell and then the Battalion was rushed up to Crete Simone, which it held for 24 hours against odds of four to one.

#### RETREAT FROM SERBIA.

Another action was fought on Memsili ridge and then a withdrawal to Causli was ordered and conducted in a most praiseworthy manner, though there was nothing but a goat track to guide the way and the distance was over four miles up a mountain with the enemy close behind.

It was during this retreat from Serbia that the men of the Regimental transport earned undying fame. No praise is too high for their loyal co-operation and devotion to duty, their zeal and untiring efforts: they won a name and reputation during these operations second to none, and in each

succeeding campaign they heaped fresh laurels to it, yet their work remained unrecognised in any tangible form until the close of the war.

On the 12th December the Division reached Doiran, on the frontier, with the Bulgar in close pursuit, so that it was necessary for outposts to be supplied both in front and rear, since it was quite on the cards that the Greeks would at this stage engage us in active operations.

The ration strength of the Division was much reduced and a Battalion of another Division arrived here for outpost duty. That the enemy was pressing is proved by the fact that this Battalion, the 9th K.O.R.L. Regiment, lost an entire company, but nevertheless no other alarming development ensued, and it was decided to concentrate at Salonica.

#### REFLECTIONS.

Many slanders have been aimed at this operation and the authors of it by ignorant individuals, but the fact remains that there was nothing to gain but everything to lose by a heavy engagement in Serbia, which might just have been the deciding factor in bringing the Greeks in against us: even as it was, the enemy at one place had surrounded us on three sides, and by all the rules of warfare should have captured the entire Division.

The question that naturally suggests itself is: What is the secret of our failure to influence the course of the venture in our favour? and the reply is, simply that our indecisive, half-hearted measures in sending one Division instead of five was almost



as fatal as if the British had remained out of this campaign altogether, as was proposed at the time, according to what is now known.

The march to Salonica was such as to have tried to the utmost the endurance of the best troops in the world, yet in spite of the severity of the test, the Battalion rolled into camp at Salonica, at 1600, on December 18, as if it had only been on an ordinary route march.

Great excitement had prevailed in Salonica since the first attack, and four more Divisions had arrived and placed the town in a state of defence.

After a sojourn of a few days in camp, on the Monastir road, the 10th Division moved to camp, at Hortakos.

## SALONICA.

Having followed the course and results of the operations in which the Battalion and the Division had been engaged for those five months, is it any wonder that the efficiency of the troops had suffered somewhat, and that their first experience of the actual conduct of the war should have perhaps altered their outlook on the whole business.

Men of inferior quality would have been adversely affected by the same experience to such a degree as would have required a great effort to repair, yet in one month after reaching Salonica the efficiency, *morale*, and discipline of the Battalion stood at a level as high as it had ever reached in the whole course of its career, and the congratulations on its speedy recovery from the effects of such unsatisfactory undertakings as Gallipoli and Serbia received then, were reiterated again nearly three years afterwards by the Divisional Commander, on whom it had made such an impression that he never forgot the splendid response which he had from all ranks of the Battalion, to the demands he made on the troops of the Division when he assumed command.

A certain amount of training and much sport



was the daily programme for January and February 1916, and the Battalion excelled itself. The football team was everywhere victorious, and the unit had its revenge on the 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers for the many defeats in the world of sport it had suffered in Dublin, and Basingstoke, by winning almost 90 per cent. of the events, including both military and sporting, of the Brigade competitions.

#### GENERAL SARRAIL.

When General Sarraill, the Allied Commander-in-Chief, expressed a desire to inspect a unit of the British forces, it was this Battalion that was selected for the compliment, and there was no doubt that he was pleased with what he saw.

Though the Bulgarians had not crossed the frontier there must have been some idea of the possibility of their doing so, for work was now hastened, both on the inner and outer Salonica defences, and the Battalion changed its location to Azrameri, to take part in this work in April.

After about six weeks' stay there, a further advance was made to Ajvatli, on the outer defences, and the conditions of inactivity and oppressive heat here is one of the most unpleasant memories of the Salonica campaign.

There was not a word of information as to how our immediate enemy was employing this period, until in July we learned that the Greeks had surrendered to him the forts of Rupel and Kavalla. This may have been the reason for a counter-move on the part of the British forces,

which brought the Battalion to Paprat, a village in the mountains, just opposite the Rupel pass. Here it was intended that we should take over the line from the 28th Division, but for some reason unknown to us, though rumoured that it was because of the French troops moving to Monastir, and allocating the entire Struma sector to the British, the plan was altered, and then took place one of the most memorable marches of the Battalion.

#### FIRST NIGHT MARCH.

This was the first night tactical march undertaken since the introduction of pack mule transport, and the only possible route across the mountains and into the plain was a mule track, which, but for the searchlights of the enemy, would have been difficult to find.

Eventually, Turica was reached at 0200, and the following day the march was continued to the bridgehead on the Struma river, on the Serres road, which, by the way, was the only road in this part of the country. Here the line of defence was the river itself, one of the most unhealthy districts of the world.

The Battalion relieved the 10th Hants Regiment, and assumed responsibility for a section of the river, extending from a point midway between the village of Orljak, and the Bridge to Gudeli ferry, southwards, a distance of three miles, with headquarters at Sacavka.

At this time, that is, at the end of July, the



enemy had not yet occupied Serres in the foothills opposite and about six miles across as the crow flies; nor had he come down from the mountains, so that no strong defences were constructed, and it was possible to ride through No Man's Land.

It was not until the following month when the 30th Brigade had relieved the 31st, which had gone back to the foothills, that the Bulgarians occupied the intervening plain. Feverish activity then animated the British forces, and within one month two strong lines of defence had been placed in existence, while the enemy made good his occupation of the villages of the plain.

Whether it was his intention to cross the river is immaterial to the fact that, for the first time, a concrete plan of action was given to us; the enemy was to be expelled from the plain, and orders were issued accordingly.

#### THE FIRST ACTION.

The first action took place on September 10, which, rightly or wrongly, was not an attack with the definite object of capturing the nearer villages and establishing ourselves, a plan which, in the humble opinion of the writer, would have succeeded, but it was a reconnaissance in force across the river.

In heavy rain the Battalion left Kopaci, where it had been engaged on the reserve trenches and concentrated at Kamarjan, on the river, on the night of September 9. At 1300, the following day, the 31st Brigade crossed the river in rafts and at Zero, hour which was 1400, the action commenced

with the co-operation of the 28th Division on our left, in a similar engagement, and the cavalry between the French colonial troops, and ourselves on the right.

The objective allotted to the Battalion was to find out the strength of the opposing force in the village of Jenikos, and report on the defences of the place. The results were entirely successful, though the village itself, which was three miles from the point of deployment, was not entered, chiefly because of destructive enfilade fire on our right from Bala and Zir, two villages against which the remainder of the Brigade was engaged.

After dark, the Battalion performed the delicate operation of breaking off the action and disengaging itself from contact with the enemy in a most praiseworthy manner. Thereafter, every man and every casualty, except the killed, whom it was impossible to bring back, was conducted quietly and safely across the river again.

The sequel to this reconnaissance was the ejection of the Bulgarians out of the forward half of the plain by a concerted attack of three British Divisions, and though our tactical position was not an ideal one, with all the advantages of observation against us, yet we had room for manœuvre, and had made the crossing of the river by the Bulgar impossible.

#### THE STRUMA VALLEY.

In October, the Battalion was in Baskos in the foothills, in reserve; the 31st Brigade being



on the right of the Divisional front, when operation orders were issued, with the object of forcing the enemy further back into the mountains.

It is well to keep in mind an idea of the geographical conditions of the battlefield. The Struma river flowed through the Rupel Pass, and then southwards into the sea. The Struma valley was a very fertile plain, some ten miles wide, with the Bellashitza mountains on the East, and a similar range, though not nearly so high, on the West. Malarial fever was the curse of this valley, so that even the natives themselves called it the valley of death.

The Battalion was in support for the attack on Topolova, and similar encounters were undertaken by the 28th and 27th Divisions, the result of which gave us complete control of the plain, which we occupied throughout the winter, and evacuated in May 1917, though the sector which included the Kalendra outposts, where there was always much patrol activity, was our home for most of the time.

Christmas 1916, found the Battalion in Orljak, in reserve, and next month in the line at Jenikos, then alternatively in reserve at Mekes, until the evacuation of the plain in May, which accounted for the unit making its quarters behind Koles Kop.

It was here where the famous Inniskilling or "Skins' Road" was made, but within a year we were to construct a road christened with the same name, but in comparison with which the Koles Kop one was but a lane.

At one stage of our period in the Struma valley, it was contemplated by the higher command to employ our Brigade in an attack on the Doiran front, and, accordingly we moved by march route to Guvezne, a village on the Serres road, about 20 kilometres from Salonica, and 50 from the river, but the scheme was not put into effect, and the Battalion remained on the Struma front until September, 1917, when orders were received for the Division to be despatched to Egypt.

Thus ended the third campaign in which the unit had taken part since leaving England, and in concluding this account of it, the splendid services of the Divisional Train are referred to as commanding the confidence and admiration of all ranks of the infantry. Arduous is a term too mild to describe their work under every conceivable difficulty, only surpassed by those to prevail in Palestine, yet the Train never failed on any single occasion to have rations with the infantry.



## PALESTINE.

An uneventful sea voyage brought the Division to Egypt, and, without any delay after landing, it was conveyed by rail to Ismailia, where for the first time since July, 1915, the men had a small degree of freedom in a town (of sorts); and right well they deserved it, the only pity being that the time was not spent in Cairo or Alexandria instead. It is easy to believe that such a brief period of enjoyment and holiday might well have renewed their spirit in preparation for the sterner work ahead.

But it was not to be so, and on October 2, we left Ismailia by rail for Kantara, the advanced base of the Expeditionary Force, and thence marched across the desert to Rafa, where a short period of intensive training was performed.

The scarcity of water in Macedonia was bad, in Gallipoli it was worse, but here the water famine was a more serious problem still, and, if the Turks had poisoned the supply in subsequent operations, of which not the least important objective of our attacks was the capture of the supply, the Palestine campaign would have had a

very different ending, and Egypt might not now be under the British flag.

## SHERIA.

October 31, found the Battalion in contact with the enemy at Irgoeg, where it undertook a brilliant little operation of its own, and won the water supply, on which three divisions had to depend.

The troops' anxiety to get into action was soon removed, for, two days afterwards, the 60th and 10th Divisions joined in a lively attack on Sheria, and the wonderful system of Turkish trenches known as the Rushdi system. The enemy was badly smashed, and all our objectives gained, in spite of the fact that the artillery horses, in many cases, had been 48 hours without water, and many men went into action with empty bottles.

## HAREIRA.

That evening the Battalion took part in the pursuit of the enemy and, still, without water, was on outpost duty all night, only to be rushed up again at daybreak into the fight for the Hareira redoubt, a huge mound wonderfully well fortified.

The spirit and dash of the troops was splendid, and while the 2nd Battalion, Royal Irish Fusiliers, took responsibility for the actual redoubt itself, our unit advanced on its right, and the capture of the redoubt was due in no small measure to the brilliant attack of the 6th Inniskillings.

The Turk was again defeated and driven back, and for the third successive night without rest, but,



this time, with plenty of water, the Battalion pursued the retreating Turk and gave him no rest.

Then, the 29th Brigade relieved the 31st, and afterwards, the entire division was withdrawn to railhead at Karm, as the advance of the army had been greater than the supply and transport services could keep pace with.

#### GAZA AND BEER SHEBA.

The fighting alluded to was in the centre of a line from Gaza to Beer Sheba, and was the apex of a wedge driven in to form a salient and facilitate the capture of these two towns. This method was entirely successful, though, the burden of the fighting fell to the troops in the centre, and, as in this case, so later, when the ultimate objectives were Jerusalem and Jaffa, and, later still, when the towns concerned were Cambrai and St. Quentin, the Battalion always happened to be among the troops allotted to the task of driving in the wedge in the centre to secure the automatic evacuation by the enemy of the towns at the extremities.

From Karm, after the fall of Gaza and Beer Sheba, our Division moved further back still, and spent a pleasant week at Bela, where sea bathing and a good canteen greatly added to the enjoyment of the rest. But the Turk was not to be given any respite to collect his scattered and demoralised forces, nor to be allowed to reorganise and rearrange his plans. Our railway construction had been hastened, so that, after a week, it was possible for us to take up the chase again.

The marching was a severe test, yet, the spirit of the troops made light of it, and after six days' hard tracking, we came up with the Turk in the valley of Ajalon, and, after passing Latron, we took over a sector of the line and brought pressure to bear on the enemy, so that in a few days he moved back to a more comfortable position. We maintained our pressure and finding him still uneasy, we decided to launch an attack on his position.

The Australians took over our sector about December 13, and we were diverted towards Tahta, where our whole time was devoted to road making.

#### A CHRISTMAS MEMORY.

Bad weather delayed the proposed attack and Christmas had arrived before it took place. This Christmas will ever remain a memory of the war for those who were there. There was no shelter from the torrential rain, rations were short, and were destroyed by rain before they arrived. A mail was out of the question, and, to make matters worse, the Army's Secret Agents discovered that the Turk had planned an attempt to retake Jerusalem on Christmas day, so we had to stand-to all day.

Fortunately, the rain that prevented the celebration of Christmas also upset the enemy's calculations, and his attack was delayed, as ours was until the 27th inst., but when zero hour, 6 a.m., arrived, and the troops were assembled in the Wady Es Sult, their spirit was in no way damped, and their eagerness and hope of success were very apparent.



The first act of this drama was an attack on Kareina Peak, in conjunction with similar operations on our right and left by other units. The enemy offered a stubborn resistance, and was greatly assisted by the nature of the ground, but at zero plus three, the hill was in our hands.

#### OUR FIRST V.C.

Unfortunately, one company had more casualties than was necessary, owing to an error of judgment of their leader, but it was just this error that gave Private Duffy the opportunity of winning the first V.C. for the 10th Division. He was a stretcher bearer, and the way in which he walked into almost certain death, not once, but several times, and, not accidentally, but deliberately, to succour wounded men was wonderful to behold.

The Turks had now got well into the Judean hills, and more difficult country could scarcely be imagined.

The mountains were not in regular ranges or formation of any sort, and it required the greatest care and skill in map reading to know one's location at any time. Besides, the huge boulders and steepness of the hills provided excellent opportunity for enemy ambushes as well as making our advances supremely difficult.

#### COUNTER ATTACK ON JERUSALEM.

Well, the deferred counter-attack on Jerusalem took place, as we had been warned, on Christmas day, and, resulted not only in the rout of the

attackers, but materially assisted our advance, and placed the Turkish force in an unenviable position.

The news reached us at Kareina, where, while waiting for developments at Jerusalem, we had witnessed the novel occurrence of the 5th Royal Irish Regiment, the Pioneer Battalion, making a road actually on the battlefield during the operations, and, when at mid-day, the Battalion resumed the offensive, this road had reached to the top of Kareina.

El Harfi was the next objective and it took four hours hard fighting and strenuous climbing to drive the Turk off this hill, so that darkness concluded the day's advance, which had been more satisfactory than the most sanguine expectations.

Our old friends, the 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers, had, as usual, played their part splendidly, and vied with us in the speed of their advance on our right.

#### EL MUNTAR.

Now, as in each separate stage of the attack, from one hill to another, so with the advance on El Muntar. There was a steep descent in full view of the enemy, a crossing of a deep ravine or wady, and a long climb up to the enemy's position.

At mid-day, on December 28, the Battalion moved off, after having sustained some casualties while in process of assembling. Extraordinary country brought forth extraordinary methods for advance, and thanks to an ingenious, but novel idea of one company commander, our casualties were insignificant in comparison with what they must have been had



any of the stereotyped methods of advancing under fire been employed here; and before the Turkish machine gunners realised that more troops than a few odd patrols had "gone over the top," the whole Battalion was well on its way through Ain Arik village, in which they got a very different reception from that accorded to the same troops in France 10 months later.

#### ADVANCE CONTINUES.

The enemy fled in disorder and spurred the British on to further effort, so that permission was asked for and granted to continue the pursuit. Worn out and weary as our men were, it put new heart into them to think of catching up the retreating forces, and they enjoyed the element of sport now introduced. The rate of our subsequent advance may be gauged by the fact that when light failed we had made good Abu Shukeidem and Et Tireh, nearer ridge, a good three hours' ordinary walk from El Muntar, and established ourselves in security for the night.

This hill fighting had taught us many lessons. The frontages were so extended that our only communication was semaphore. Constant conversations between company commanders were essential for correct co-operation. And again, once a hill was gained, it was madness to thrust men over the skyline before a proper reconnaissance had been made; yet, at the same time, it was all important to harass the fleeing Turks. The ammunition supply was a great problem, and it generally meant that

the Reserve Company was so loaded as to be almost immobile as a Reserve.

Ramallah, and Bireh, its suburb, on the Jerusalem-Nablus road were now in view, and to cut off the enemy in his retreat from this town was our next task. The Turk was in full occupation; and thanks to the road he had more guns with him now, but he was threatened with being enveloped on two sides. Our guns had followed up with truly remarkable rapidity, and as soon as the Battalion, by a dashing attack on the morning of the 30th, secured the mountain commanding the enemy's line of retreat from Ramallah, our artillery got into position and played havoc with the enemy and his determined resolve to maintain his hold on this important position.

#### HALT AT AIN ARIK.

Our job had been done and more than fulfilled expectations: we had again advanced more quickly than the construction of the roads, and so went back to Ain Arik for a well earned rest.

But a month of incessant rain and cold made our time at Ainarik one of the worst experiences of the war. There was no cover from the elements; bivouaced on the side of a wady with a perpetual shortage of rations, our lot was not a happy one, and we almost wished that we had not driven the Turk so quickly.

But the weather did not prevent us, with the aid of 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers, constructing a road than which the most highly trained experts could



not have done better. Any doubt as to our ability to manœuvre in these Judean hills that the enemy may have entertained was quickly dispelled when he saw capital roads with almost lightning rapidity follow the storming troops through the most inaccessible country as if they grew by nature.

The halt at Ain Arik is significant for another reason: it was during this time that the men were underfed for the first and last time during the war when it was unnecessary.

#### NAZARETH.

The enemy had gone back a long way now with the intention of making a stand sufficiently far in front of Nablus (or Nazareth) to secure that place as headquarters, but our game was to exert the maximum amount of pressure on them so as to thwart their plans: accordingly the Battalion found itself in the line at Harash, and by dint of continued short advances to keep contact with the Turk we manœuvred them and ourselves into a favourable position for another battle.

The outstanding topographical and tactical feature here was the wady Elgib, like so many others we had encountered, but much more formidable. The 30th Brigade were in the line near Beireszeit when the 31st opened the battle by an attack towards Kalraway and Tahta and the high ground south of the wady Gib. As progress was small the 30th Brigade joined in on the left with the 29th on its left, and the 74th and 75th Divisions on the right and left again. A successful effort drove the enemy

across the wady and secured for our arms the high ground on the north of it.

#### FAILURE, YET SUCCESS.

The line was established here now and commanded a view of the country as far as Nablus. The Brigade held from Sinjil, exclusive through K 4 to Jiljilia, inclusive with a reserve Battalion in the wady El Gib, which incidentally was later transformed into a good road. The Turkish line was a very formidable one, and though lower on the El Burg, Gherabi ridge to our right front was higher than ours. Opposite our left was Fokka, the most prominent feature of the whole country side. No Man's Land, as usual, consisted of a steep wady, the Gharib, which made raiding an impossibility. Nevertheless, a raid was ordered and carried out in spite of the presence of every conceivable difficulty by C Company. This was the only failure in the history of the Battalion and yet the object of it was achieved, namely to make the enemy think that it was preliminary to a further attack.

But the raid was doomed to failure even before the raiders started, and a full moon eliminated the essential element of surprise.

It was apparent from the largely increased number of hostile guns in action that the enemy intended holding this position. Numerous patrols of ours reconnoitred the position but it was obvious that it would take a considerable time to prepare for a successful encounter here.



The higher command conceived the plan of making Fokka the objective, and of approaching it from the west side. This plan seemed feasible, and promised success, but, although our Brigade, the 31st, was formed into a mobile unit specially selected to take the lead in this ambitious scheme, and was hastily transferred to Neby Saleh on the left flank of the Division, fortune intervened to stay the action.

It was arranged that the 75th Division was to push straight forward, and the mobile column would then follow and turn right, sweep along the Fokka ridge, parallel to the Divisional front, and establish itself on the peak, thus compelling the Turk to evacuate El Burg. However, the scheme was abandoned, either because the enemy had learned of our proposals, or, perhaps, the urgent demand from France at that time for men was the cause, and for a month or two more the position remained as it was. It is said that when eventually General Allenby's victorious advance started from here, that the idea of forcing a way through these hills was superseded by an encircling movement in the plains on the left.

#### ON THE MOVE

However, this was the last operation in which the Battalion took part, and at the beginning of April orders were received that the now famous 10th (Irish) Division was to close all its service Battalions, which were to be replaced by Indian troops, and the 6th Royal Inniskillings were to

share in their fifth campaign and theatre of war.

Our successes in Palestine had put new heart into the troops, who were in the highest spirits when the long march to railhead commenced in May.

There is not space here to record the address of the Corps, Divisional and Brigade Commanders, as each bade farewell to the Battalion, but it was evident to their audience that each spoke from his inmost conviction, and with no wish to flatter: they left no doubt that they were more than pleased with our work, and genuinely sorry to lose our services. The unanimous opinion of the troops was that their chances of serving under a Divisional or Brigade Commander who inspired their confidence more than Major-General Longley, and Brigadier-General Morris, were not fancied; but, as a matter of fact, the Battalion was singularly fortunate in this respect in France, in being placed in the 151st Brigade of the 50th Division, where both Brigadier-General Sugden and Major-General Jackson were proud of our Battalion, as it was of them; and did not think more highly of it, than every single soldier and officer thought of their Divisional Commander.

#### KANTARA.

To revert to our record of events in Palestine, the Battalion eventually reached Kantara, where there was a delay of over a fortnight, during which the equipment of the unit was altered to the scale required in France.



There was a capital opportunity now of allowing the men a short leave in Cairo, which they so richly deserved, as a substitute for home leave, which had been impossible for three-and-a-half years. Some units took advantage of this chance, and gained by it in every respect, but through the shortsightedness of our Commanding Officer the privilege was denied to our men, unfortunately for all concerned.

Kantara was a foul and miserable place to be camped at any time of year. In this season it was well nigh unbearable, and there can be no excuse for the neglect to give the men this change and freedom, even as a matter of expediency. There was no earthly reason why every man in the Battalion should not have had three days in Cairo, to the general benefit of the unit.

## FRANCE.

After an exciting voyage from Alexandria, during which one ship of the convoy was torpedoed, the port of Marseilles was reached and embarkation commenced without delay.

The Battalion marched through the town to a camp close by and remained there for two days before entraining.

Here again it was difficult to understand why permission to visit the town was denied to three-quarters of the men of this unit, while no such restriction was placed on other units. It was a foolish, unprofitable policy for which one person alone was responsible. Remember that these men's conduct, behaviour and work at all times had won the admiration of all with whom they came in contact for the past three years on service, during which time they had been completely isolated from towns or civilisation.

Their only compensation was a view of England, for the train was diverted from the congested lines so that it took a circuitous route via Boulogne until Ayr was reached at midnight on May 1.

## DIEPPE.

There was much activity in the air and in the line a few miles away, when the Battalion detrained



and started for Lillers, a small deserted village, which had already come under enemy fire. Here fresh milk was obtainable for the first time since we left England, and eggs were forthcoming in small quantities. Our *role* now was reserve to the 12th Suffolk Regiment, which held the line at St. Venant, and with the Portuguese we constructed a reserve line of trenches; but the Battalion's stay here was short, for in accordance with the plans for re-organising and absorbing troops from the East and preparing them for the principal part of the anticipated great allied offensive, we moved to Dieppe, the final place of concentration for most of these troops; though while awaiting this decision the Battalion joined a second Division for a short time which was spent in billets in the small village of Campeigne, and after two weeks here another change brought it to Abancourt, where the final allotment to divisions of the various units from the East took place.

The Battalion was selected for the 50th Division, and our only regret was that the 5th Royal Irish Fusiliers, our comrades for so long, were sent to another Division, and the close association of the two units, from which both units themselves and the formation to which they belonged had derived such benefit, was terminated.

Almost three months were allocated to the re-formed 50th Division to prepare for the great offensive, during which time every man got his long over-due home leave. Much excellent training was

done and nothing was required but a really good C.O. to make that sojourn in Dieppe perfect in every way. The conditions themselves were perfect and the Battalions brigaded with us were of the right metal.

#### FOR THE SOMME.

The opportunity for which we had waited came at last, and all our joys and sorrows vanished. On September 1 the Division entrained, and the Battalion was directed to the village of Sus St. Leger as the first step towards the serious work that was ahead.

After a few days a convoy of busses whirled the troops to Pierregot as the second phase, and after two days' halt here the last stage of the journey brought us to Nurlo, within a few miles of Peronne.

Now the Battalion was, at last, in the heat of action in France and had only to wait a few days for the opportunity of proving its mettle in this theatre of war as it had done in others under very different conditions. Open warfare was its speciality, and as the Hindenburg line had already been bitten, trench war was a thing of the past.

#### CAMBRAI.

On the last day of September the news received was not encouraging on our part of the front. The general plan was to force the capitulation of Cambrai and St. Quentin by driving a salient through the enemy's lines, midway between these two towns, and the American troops had not been entirely successful in the first move by reason of a clever



German ruse in connection with the tunnel in this sector. The Australians made a gallant attempt against enormous odds to relieve them and only just failed, so now our turn came and having moved into battered Epehy the night before, we took over from the Australians on October 3 at Bony and prepared to finish their task.

The key to the whole position was Prospect Hill, about three miles forward, a hill running north and south, about 1600 yards from the eastern outskirts of the village of Gouay. With the presence of every known element in warfare operating against success, the Brigade commenced the attack at 6.5 a.m. on October 3 on this important position, the Battalion leading.

With the chances 100 to one against us the hill was in our possession at zero plus 2½ hours, so far as the extremities went, but, unfortunately, the frontage was too extended for the depleted Battalion, and a gap in the centre of the hill remained in the enemy's hands. Another Battalion should have been pushed into that gap.

Nevertheless, the positions gained were held in spite of fairly heavy casualties, but many prisoners were taken.

The half Battalion on the left was relieved that night, but owing to the perilous position of B company on the right, it was not possible to effect its relief, nor even to send rations or water to them, so it was left to hold on for two more days and nights, and not until another division passed

through to continue the advance was it possible for this company to rejoin the Battalion behind Bony, in the trenches of the Hindenburg line on October 6.

#### VILLERS OUTREAUX.

The next item on the programme was an attack on Villers Outreaux, and the farms on the north side of Prospect Hill, for which the Battalion was in reserve. The direction of the advance which had taken the enemy's main system in enfilade was now changed toward Beaurevoir from the west.

That night the enemy retired, and October 8 is made memorable by an effective bombing of the Battalion's position, during darkness, at Vauxhall Quarry.

The villages of Graincourt, Gouay, and Le Catelet, were the last of the devastated area, and the Hun withdrawal had brought us now into quite good open country. On October 9, a convoy of motor busses brought us to Marez, a large village, very little damaged, in support of the 66th Division, which had taken up the pursuit of the enemy.

Throughout the ten days' rest in this place, while the artillery got into position for the next battle, the inactivity of hostile aircraft was most remarkable. The road through the town was crowded with one continual stream of traffic going and coming, both day and night, yet no bombing took place.



## LE CATEAU.

The line had been established on the high ground overlooking Le Cateau, with the enemy in a similar position on the east side of the town itself, which, owing to its low position, was untenable to either force.

It was all important that the Germans should not be allowed time to add fortification to their already strong natural positions, and accordingly a daring attack on a large scale was planned for October 17, in which the Battalion took the leading share of the part allocated to the Division.

The Selle river flowed across the front of our line from Le Cateau on the left to the village of Benin on the right, and the railway embankment, which was held by the enemy in force, strongly fortified and defended by rising ground in rear, was 300 yards further on.

The plan of action, so far as it concerned the Battalion, was under cover of a bombardment on the railway: the river was to be crossed, the railway gained, and then one of the most difficult operations known in modern warfare was to be performed. The Battalion was to turn left and attack astride the railway, enfiladed throughout by the enemy beyond the railway, and to advance to Le Cateau.

The morning was foggy when a terrific bombardment of guns of all calibres gave the signal to commence. A smoke barrage had been arranged, so that it was impossible to see ten yards away.

It is impossible to say what would have happened had the atmosphere been clear, but the nett result as things were was, that at midday some 200 prisoners and ten machine guns were in our hands, and though the enemy maintained an almost impregnable position on a natural redoubt overlooking the station, and was still in possession of the high buildings on the outskirts of the town, from which he held up our attack, yet the whole railway had been cleared and the station and buildings occupied and held in spite of three counter attacks.

Towards dusk the Scottish Horse ejected the enemy from the redoubt, and after suffering from heavy shell fire during the night and early morning the Battalion launched an admirably conducted attack on the sugar factory and continued to a point nearly two miles along the railway.

Our line had been considerably shortened by this manœuvre, and on October 20, the Battalion was withdrawn into billets at Rusigny, where it received the special congratulations and thanks of the higher commanders for its share in a most difficult and successful enterprise, this being the second time in the month that the results of our work had a most important bearing on the major operations of the corps.

## DRAFT FROM CHESHIRE.

Following a welcome ten days' rest in Rusigny the unit was again called upon for a further effort, which was destined to be the last required of it. The large casualties sustained had been hurriedly



repaired by a draft from the Cheshire and other English regiments, and their subsequent conduct in action with the Inniskillings redounded greatly to their credit. The men of the Cheshire draft especially brought new honours to the Inniskillings, and covered with glory the name of their old regiment.

#### MORMAL FOREST.

A study of the maps at this stage showed the great Mormal Forest as the next problem to be tackled. Wood fighting until now had been the only sort of warfare in which the Battalion had not had much experience, but this fact in no way damped our ardour.

On October 26 a move was made into shell-stricken Le Cateau, which was still under accurate fire, and two days later we relieved the Royal Munster Fusiliers in the line, on the western border of the southern end of the forest at Robersart.

No Man's Land was a small area here and the country was very close. The enemy was very active, and to maintain our line without unnecessary casualties required the greatest vigilance and care. By October 3 all was in readiness for the advance on the forest and across the Sambre which was part of a general advance of more than one Army. The battalion's share in introducing the advance was a splendidly executed dashing attack on a strongly held farm house by B Company without the support of any barrage. No praise is too high for this minor action which cleared the

way for the whole Battalion. The secret of its success was the rapidity with which the house was surrounded and the garrison surprised. Four officers, 90 other ranks, and six machine guns were in the possession of our Company fifteen minutes after it started on the errand, and, though C Company in gaining the road on the left had suffered to some extent, B Company had only one killed and two wounded.

D Company had been ordered to assist another Brigade on our right, but while at the concentration point an enemy mine exploded, and in its midst, and so depleted the Company as to render it useless as a unit for this purpose.

The general attack was proceeding so satisfactorily that the Battalion was hurried into the firing line and joined in the advance through the forest on a frontage of 1,000 yards with the right resting on the railway running along the Sambre canal.

Fortunately, the opposition encountered actually within the forest was not serious, and our attention was mainly concentrated on the right flank until a strong rear guard of the German force was met at dusk in a very unfavourable position for us. After consultation it was decided that owing to the approach of darkness, the absence of machine guns and trench mortars, and the facts that besides the troops being tired out after twelve hours continuous advancing the nature of the country precluded assistance from the Artillery, the attack should be postponed until the morning.



That night was an anxious one for B Company, which was on the right flank completely exposed, and it was confidently expected that fresh troops of the Brigade would resume the advance in the morning. However, the orders issued that night detailed the battalion to lead off again at 6 a.m., and accordingly B Company indulged in two night patrol actions with the object of driving in the enemy's forward observation posts on the railway line.

No commendation is too high for the magnificent work of the transport *personnel* during these operations, and the heroes of each day were to be found there and in the rank and file of the battalion. The transport won immortal fame in the crossing of the Selle river with ammunition and supplies in broad daylight on October 17, under a furious bombardment when each mule had to swim across with its load. They excelled themselves on this occasion, when, owing to the demolition of bridges, there seemed a possibility of their record of never having failed with ammunition or rations throughout 3½ years of service in the field, by delivering rations, hot tea and rum forty minutes before zero in darkness, under a bombardment in the forward parts of the front line.

#### TWO SPLENDID COMRADES.

It is invidious to single out any particular soldier for special mention, but this story of the part played by the 6th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in the Great War would not be complete without a

word of praise for Private Samuel M'Mullen, whose deeds in action on October 3, at Prospect Hill, will ever live so long as there remains alive one man who saw them, and whose grave is there now; and Private Willie Graham, whose example in action during the last three days of the war, and especially at Doullers, had more than anything else to do with the success of his company. To him, too, came a higher reward than any we could give, for he died of wounds on the battlefield two hours before the last shot of the war was fired, and is buried with many other splendid lads at Doullers.

#### B COMPANY AGAIN.

Once again B Company with justifiable pride in the confidence reposed in it, led the attack on Hatchet village, having "mopped up" the railway crossing *en route*. It dashed into the village unsupported, made clean work of two machine guns and their crews posted on the roofs of houses, and with thoroughness and celerity characteristic of the methods adopted by the battalion in all these successive attacks, had the line established according to plan and the village secure within 80 minutes of zero hour.

A dashing little affair undertaken at the instance of a private soldier without awaiting orders cleared from a post about 800 yards in front of our line the last enemy machine gun in action here.

Then came one of those glorious opportunities of rest without anxiety. The enemy had now been cleared from the entire forest; he had been badly



hammered and was much disorganised. It was possible to relax somewhat the exacting vigilance required during the past week and to have some food in comparative comfort.

Though the enemy was still in occupation on our right flank, yet the canal made a counter attack from that quarter unlikely.

#### TIRED MEN PURSUE.

But heavy and continuous rain now put an end to all thought of rest, and the night was spent in flooded trenches, hastily constructed. Two patrols were sent across the canal on reconnaissance duty, and except for some shelling the night was otherwise quiet.

But the fact of the Huns disorganisation was the reason for continuing their discomfort at all costs, and, worn out as the men were, they eagerly responded to the call, and in torrential rain made their way to Noyelles, whence after a brief sleep in billets we directed our steps towards where our Brigade was thrown into the pursuit.

A glance at the map will make the reader marvel that troops could cover these distances in battle formation in the time they did.

It was the practice for our Brigade in this leap-frog method of advance repeatedly to assume the frontage of the other two Brigades, and this occasion was no exception.

#### ST. AUBIN.

After reaching St. Remy it was deemed advisable for the Battalion, which had come this far in

march formation with just the ordinary precautions, to adopt a more elastic formation, as the enemy was holding the village at St. Aubin. However, the final objective assigned to the Brigade was some three miles beyond St. Aubin so that no time could be lost. Accordingly, on approaching the village the Battalion extended and dealt with any remaining Bosch. The precautions that were imperative, so that the exhaustive mopping up of the village could be accomplished, accounted for the fact that most of the hostile infantry and machine gunners eluded their pursuers and were ably assisted by the scattered nature of the houses and the close country surrounding them effecting their escape.

After re-organisation the scent was followed up again with the idea of reaching the main Avesnes-Mauberge road before dark, and this time the proposition was serious, for it was soon apparent that the enemy intended to contest every foot of ground in this area, and there is no doubt that we were not prepared for the stand he made here. Our guns were not up, and neither the trench mortar battery nor the machine gun Battalion had been able to keep pace with the advance.

#### DOULLERS.

The village of Doullers itself which was on our left, and the centre of the brigade front, was useless to the enemy as a defensive position, but on either side and in rear of the village he had a large number of machine guns skilfully sited and, assisted by the



formation of the ground, he stopped the battalion's advance in spite of the most heroic efforts of platoons and sections to work round his flanks.

The struggle here was intense, but the enemy had the upper hand and kept it until morning. The ground over which the battalion had to pass was void of any cover, and the right flank was open, but the final object was in sight, and this spurred the men on to further effort, so that it was with every confidence that A and B Company led off at dawn the next morning, November 8.

The resistance of the enemy here was indeed formidable, and many brave fellows were killed, but the spirit in which they fought was wonderful, and in spite of exceedingly heavy casualties they wore down the fire of the enemy, and pressed home the advantage, ably seconded by the covering fire of the machine gun company.

#### SECRET OF SUCCESS.

Once again the secret of the success was the dash infused into the attack, and the achievement which surpassed anything yet accomplished by the unit in action was the work of the non-commissioned officers and men. There were only five officers remaining with the battalion after the fighting of the past week, and the result of the battle at Mont Doullers testifies more eloquently than words to the magnificent quality of the men, and the sterling ability of the non-commissioned officers, to whom alone is due the honour of this victory in the final battle of the Great War.

#### ENDING THE WAR.

The Avesnes-Mauberge road was gained at 0730 and our line established one mile in front. At 1000 the Hun launched a counter attack and pressed it with great determination, supported by his artillery, but in spite of his persistent attempt, our line held in every part, and after two hours he was repulsed. Thus ended the part played by the 6th (S.) Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers in the European War—a glorious part of which it may be justly proud, and which showed how safe in its keeping was the honoured name of the regiment.

At 1500 the responsibility for maintaining the ground gained was handed over to the 149th Brigade, and the battalion returned to St. Remy for a rest such as it had never known before, since no doubt as to the utter defeat and demoralisation of the German arms now remained, and the end of the war was only a matter of days. Our own opinion was that one more advance would have placed the entire German Army in our hands.

#### THE ARMISTICE.

But two days afterwards the news of the signing of the Armistice was received and created neither surprise nor exultation from the troops, who were fit, ready, and eager to finish the job entirely and completely, and regarded this manner of terminating hostilities as an artifice designed to save the Germans from their just deserts and baulking the British of their lawful quarry.



Had a referendum been taken of the troops there would never have been an alternative between peace and war. Subsequent events prove that this decision would not have been less beneficial to all concerned than was the actual one that did take place and left the Allies in a state of suspense for six months, during which practical reconstruction at home was at a stand-still.

## FROM ARMISTICE TO DEMOBILISATION

The village of Monceau, close to the scene of the battle of Doullers, was the home of the Battalion until a few days before Christmas. Here it was that the first step in demobilisation took place—about 20 miners being recalled home. From now onwards all those men who belonged to that industry left for England in groups weekly. Billets were then transferred to another area, near the northern end of the Forest de Mormal, and for the next ten weeks we lived in comfortable billets in the village of Obies, where life was not altogether unenjoyable and where the inhabitants were most kindly disposed towards us.

Christmas 1918 provided a certain amount of fun, with an excuse for a really good dinner, and just as life was beginning to become monotonous demobilisation commenced. When the unit had been reduced to cadre establishment it was sent to the demolished village of Englefontein, where the environment and conditions conspired to make life well nigh unbearable, so dull

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and uneventful were the days of monotonous waiting to go home.

For the conditions governing the existence of the troops here at this time there appears no excuse, unless it was a deliberate attempt to cultivate in the soldier laziness and idleness. A further move was made in April to a chateau near Le Quesnoy, where the same conditions prevailed, and must have had a detrimental effect on the men.

It was not until June that the cadre eventually went home to Omagh for demobilisation, the last representatives of a great battalion with a great record.

Complicated demobilisation regulations and the necessity to retain a certain number of troops in France were the reasons for about 60 of the younger generation of the 6th Inniskilling men to be sent to a composite battalion of the same class and category of men from other battalions. We were sorry to lose them, for they had done a lion's share in building up the good name of the battalion, and it was disagreeable for us to know that they would not share the joy of returning home with us.

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